

Belonging: Steve Harrington and the Strange Events of 1987 by FallOut_Girl

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Billy Hargrove Redemption, F/F, F/M, Gen, How Do I Tag, I Wrote This Instead of Sleeping, M/M, Multi, Neil Hargrove is His Own Warning, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Steve Harrington Has Bad Parents, Steve Harrington Has Powers, Steve Harrington's Father Being an Asshole, don't ask me how we got here because i can't tell you

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Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Jason Lee Scott, Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove & The Party, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Jason Scott/Original Character, Joyce Byers & Steve Harrington, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Steve Harrington & Original Character(s), Steve Harrington & The Party

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Summary:

at the end of 1986, steve harrington is washed up - his mental health is in shambles, his friend group is down to nothing, and his future seems darker than ever. at the end of 1986, billy hargrove is struggling - out of the hospital and safe in an apartment with the mind flayer out of his head, he now faces the reality of recovery aided by the last person he ever thought would show up, angry and

more lost than he's ever felt before.

but 1987 is just around the corner, and it promises to be worse, better, and all around stranger than either boy could have ever predicted.

also known as: the twin fic that's been living in my head ever since one of yall brought it up on tumblr ages ago

1. thank god it's christmas

Author's Note:

I would like to dedicate this to @yikes-writes because i reblogged something from them ages ago about teddy harrington and jason scott with the usual harringrove shenanigans and it's finally turned itself into something. i hope yall enjoy!

It's Christmas eve, and Steve hasn't slept in at least three days but that's *fine*.

It's not, *not really*, but those are the two words the boy has learned to live off of: *that's fine*. It's the motto of complacency, his father said once, after hearing it on the radio. Steve was just twelve at the time and already knew then that his father's opinion wasn't worth shit. Steve isn't *complacent*, thank you very much. If he has to label himself, he thinks *chill* is a better word. He's a chill guy, he's the most chill person he knows, and everyone loves a chill person so it's *fine*.

It's stupidly early and he's on the stupid green sofa in his stupid big house and he feels like shit, which is a surprise to exactly no one. The living room is a mess – he should clean it, he thinks vaguely, but he doesn't plan on making a move anytime soon. If his parents were coming home he'd do it; can't have them knowing their son's become a wallowing slouch as of late. But they're not coming.

His mother called yesterday, trilling over the line in her unnaturally pitched voice about how Prague was just *beautiful this time of year and she wished he could be there to see but someone had to hold the fort down and speaking of they just won't be able to make it back for the holidays but how would he feel about driving to Cincinnati on New Year's Eve to join them at one of his father's business socials that would be fun right?* And Steve just listened because what else could he do?

He hadn't been expecting them, anyway. The family hadn't celebrated Christmas together in four years. The plan initially was to start taking Steve along on their trips when he turned fourteen, but

then he'd informed them he wasn't their daughter anymore, and the plan was promptly dropped.

But in those four years he'd had *options*. Tommy's family was happy to have him over, he spent many a holiday with the Hagans and then he'd spent that one truly merry Christmas with the Wheelers, and it was fine, but now he's got none of that. This year, it's him and the big empty house and he sort of hates it but *it's fine, thanks*.

Steve watches the shadows on the wall shift with the rising sun and feels some vague sense of relief; it's easier to breathe when the sun is out. That's what's been bothering him, really. When he does sleep, his dreams are plagued with darkness and cold and danger, and when he wakes up it's still darkness and he feels like he can't breathe. Those nightmares have gotten worse, infinitely worse over time. It's easier to avoid sleep altogether sometimes. And he has no obligations this holiday season, no parties to appear at or houses to crash, so he can afford the heavy circles under his eyes this year.

It's fine. It has to be fine, so it is. Even if it isn't really.

Hawkins got snow last night. Steve drags himself up from his seat and meanders to the back door, eyes gazing out over the endless white carpeting the ground outside. He used to love snow. Now anything cold makes him uncomfortable. He hates the winter, makes him think of the dark Upside Down.

Or that damned Soviet Union and their officers and their cold, cruel faces watching on as he tells them he's not a spy.

Had that really been this year? It feels like a lifetime ago. It feels like just yesterday. He tears his eyes away from the snow and pads into the kitchen in search of something warm. Coffee? Definitely coffee. He waits in the kitchen while the dark beverage brews and since he's here he figures he may as well get some food into his body. Steve can cook – it becomes a necessity when you spend most of your childhood devoid of parents – but he doesn't really want to cook. Takes too much energy, and he's not willing to put said energy into that. So he goes with toast, because you can never go wrong with toast, right? He even slathers the bread with copious amounts of

butter. It's not the most fulfilling breakfast, but he likes it well enough.

The coffee finishes brewing and Steve spills a good bit of his father's whiskey into it before dunking three spoonfuls of sugar in and retreating back to the couch. He grabs the remote on his way over and drops himself gracelessly on the cushions before pressing a button. The screen flickers to life and he chugs half of the hot beverage, flips through channel after channel before settling on some feel-good holiday movie. He hates these movies, he really does, but if he's lucky it might be enough to lull him to sleep for an hour or so.

Steve used to love Christmas movies. He watched families on television gather together and enjoy one another's company, children waiting for the magic of Santa Claus while parents shared tender moments under mistletoe. It was everything a younger Steve had desired in a holiday. Even when he had his parents home for Christmas, things had been different. Their home was filled with strange adults, co-workers of his father's and social acquaintances of his mother's. Santa Claus never came to visit him – his parents would simply give him a gift or two gathered from their trips abroad. He used to enjoy it, but as he got older the presents got less and less interesting, less personal. He went from wishing for those perfect movie-esque holidays to resenting them. That being said, they have their appeal.

Even now Steve can't help but get a sense of warm comfort and joy radiating from the film, a warm sensation wrapping around his chest. It's a strange comfort to him, in spite of his bitterness. There's something inherently warm about holidays, and yet Steve finds himself feeling cold. He wonders idly what his parents are doing now, if they'll remember to call tomorrow. The boy sits and sips on coffee and wonders and he's right about the movie because he ends up dozing for a little bit. He dreams of families and caroling and trees. He dreams of his own family – his father, a jovial man with crinkles around the corners of his eyes from laughing so much. His mother, the same soothing voice he remembers from his childhood, hugging him close and kissing his forehead and looking at him like she loves him more than life itself. And he pictures another boy there, one who sort of looks familiar. Maybe it's because the boy

looks like him. Maybe it's because Steve feels certain he's seen him before. He's never had a brother, but as a child he certainly felt convinced he had one. His mother used to tease that it was a sign that he'd make a good older brother, but little Steve Harrington had been so sure that it meant more. He wonders if he'd had a twin as a baby, if he'd been the one survivor of the pair. He doesn't know, but he's not going to question the face in his pleasant dreams. No, he just enjoys the moment, and the whole scene takes on a peaceful, golden haze. Something almost physical wounds around his body like a cat rubbing along his frame in a form of greeting. It's the nicest dream he's had in a long time.

Which is why, when the doorbell startles him out of his dreams, Steve feels like he's capable of murder.

The boy is so confused at first he doesn't realize it's his doorbell. When the incessant ringing gets accompanied by an even more incessant knocking on the door, Steve groans. The warmth seeps away and he heaves himself up from the couch. The mug is drained of its remaining lukewarm contents before he sets it on the coffee table. Footsteps land heavy as he stomps his way to the door, yanking it open and preparing to bite off the head of whoever dared to disturb him so early on Christmas Eve of all days.

His face morphs from a snarl to a look of surprise. Dustin grins up at him, oblivious to Steve's previous anger.

And he's not alone, either. El is there, too, brown eyes sparkling at him, arm tucked in Max's as they flash him identical grins. On Dustin's other side, Will's smile is something more timid than the rest of his co-conspirators. Steve's shoulders drop.

"What are you dipshits doing out here?" he snaps playfully. "Not you, of course, Will." Will's smile widens while Dustin and the girls make faces of protests.

"Hey!" Dustin squawks indignantly. "I'm your favorite, that's not allowed to change!"

"Oh yeah?" Steve's hands settled on his hips. "Who rang the doorbell?" El's hand shoots up. "Uh-huh. And who started knocking?"

The younger boy shares a guilty look with Max, who kicks guiltily at the ground. Will blinks at him in innocent confusion. Steve smirks. "So, every single one of you played a role in waking me up from my nap with the exception of Will. Little Byers is now my favorite." Max groans and Dustin makes another scandalized sound, while Will and El both try to hide their giggles. Steve feels a mix of fondness and frustration as he watches them; that seems to be his default emotion around these damned kids. Shaking his head, Steve opens the door wider. "Okay, okay, now why don't you all come in so I can figure out what I owe this visit to?"

"No need," El responds, her laughter dying down. That amused happiness never leaves her face, however. "Will you have dinner with us?"

"Mom wants you to join us," Will adds. "You can help out with the tree and everything."

"And baking and cooking and shit, because Mrs. Byers aren't the best in the kitchen," Max finishes, and even though Will makes a small attempt to protest he and El share a knowing shudder.

Sometimes, Steve forgets that Eleven's been living with the Byers' since Hopper died. But it's been good for her, she and Will have bonded in a special way, he can feel the strength of it, almost a physical weight in his mind.

Dustin bounces on his feet slightly as he looks up at the older boy. "Plus, if you say yes I can ride back to the house with you!" He grins broadly. "Whaddya say?" Steve blinks.

What *does* he say?

It's a nice idea, sure. He loves these kids, feels safe with the two adults in question, and spending the day with them promises to be interesting at the very least. But if they're all there, he has little doubt about Nancy and Jonathan being there too, and he's really not mad about it anymore but there's a little bit of awkwardness lingering between the trio. And even if he did go, those lovebirds will have each other. The party has each other. Steve is bound to be left out eventually. He knows it's not on purpose, of course, but he knows

how this goes. How many times has it happened before? And he's already a little bit pissy this holiday season, that truth isn't likely to make this any more enjoyable.

But eight pairs of eyes watch him expectantly, hopeful looks etched onto their faces. Steve's gaze shifts past them, down the driveway and he finds Jonathan's car waiting at the end and he doesn't have to see the man to know he's also waiting for an answer.

He doesn't like disappointing people. He's *chill*, Steve goes with the flow as a matter of principle, and this is where the flow seems to be leading. He makes a show of sighing, theatrics making the kids smile even wider.

"I shouldn't –" A series of pleas and protests interrupt him and he has to work hard to keep from smiling. Damn, Steve should have run off to New York or Hollywood and becoming an actor, he's good at this. "- Oh, alright. I guess I can come for a little while. Dustin pumps his fist into the air as the others grin widely. Dustin rushes to the Beamer and Max isn't far behind.

"Get your keys, Harrington, let's get moving!" he shouts. Steve can't help but laugh.

"Hang on, you little gremlin, I gotta get real clothes on! And do my hair!" The two set on riding with him dart back over and duck under his arm into the house, and Steve waves Will and El off. "Go on, you two, don't wait for me. Tell Jon I'll bring the little devils with me," he orders. Both nod eagerly before setting off back to the car. Steve sees them off before turning back into the house. Max is in the living room, face wrinkled into something resembling disgust.

"Jesus, Steve," she says, "Do you ever clean this place?" It has gotten pretty bad over the past month or so. Steve tries not to wince at the concerned judgement he feels radiating off of the redhead.

"Never, it's a point of pride at this point," he teases instead, and she makes another face, nose crinkling before she rolls her eyes and makes a snide comment about messy boys. Steve reaches over and ruffles her hair, reveling in her giggled squawk of protest. "Oh, be nice, Mayfield. It's a holiday!" Dustin's footsteps thud down the

stairs.

“It is the holidays, so I know you got me a gift, Steve,” he states, eyes narrowing. “Where is it?” Max perks up in interest now, spinning from the curly-haired kid to the taller boy, eyebrows arching up.

“Oh, uh, presents? Yeah, um -” Steve smiles sheepishly, rubbing at the back of his neck. Dustin’s eyes go wide.

“You *forgot*?” He marches down the rest of the stairs. “I can’t believe you, Harrington! Party members are supposed to get gifts for other party members! How could you forget?”

“*Steeve*,” Max whines, head falling back dramatically. “I can’t believe you!” And she shouldn’t. Neither of them should. Again, he’s sure he’s missed his calling in life with the whole acting thing. Of course he got gifts for them – tucked safely away in the trunk of his car. He doesn’t plan on outright putting his name on them, but he’s sure the kids will figure it out tomorrow morning, which ones he leaves for them.

at their antics, Steve hops up the stairs two at a time and dives into his room. How did this become his life, dealing with more barely-pubescent teens than any nineteen-year-old should? Steve’s shower is quick, and he styles up his hair before digging out an ugly sweater his grandmother had gotten him four years ago. Back then people were convinced the boy would go through a growth spurt; he did, but he hadn’t beefed up in the way everyone anticipated. The sweater still remains baggy on his slender frame, but he wears it nonetheless. Jeans are hastily yanked on and socked feet are shoved into sneakers before he trips his way down the steps.

Max and Dustin are anxious by the door, and he grins at them as he approaches the hall closet and grabs a coat. He hears his keys jangle softly in the pocket as he pulls it over his shoulders.

“The two of you have no patience,” he teases, watching them dash out to the car. He follows at a slower pace, amusement tugging at his lips. The kids are practically buzzing with excited energy, urging him to speed up, and they clamor into the car the moment he

gets it unlocked, Max beating Dustin out for the coveted shotgun position. The younger boy pouts at Steve in the rearview mirror. Steve smiles right back at him. "Don't look at me, she won this round, buddy." Max's smile is smug next to him, and Dustin scowls before slumping in the backseat. Steve shakes his head. "Alright, everybody buckle – even you, slouch potato," The kid's sulking is immediately replaced with a displeased squawk, and Steve doesn't bother to hide his pleased smile as he eases out of the driveway and out onto the road.

It's an easy trip; Steve exits Loch Nora and cruises down Dearborn. From there it's a turn onto Maple and he has Max dig out cassettes from the glove box now. Wham! sings about holidays and heartbreak as Steve drives carefully past the Sinclair home, then the Wheelers not long after. He's sure the occupants of both homes are either not there or too busy to be peering out of curtains in search of their kids' babysitter, but he doesn't want to risk having them see him do anything remotely reckless, and so he adheres to the laws of the road. Once he turns onto Cornwallis Street, he relaxes, speed inching up as he goes. Dustin's previous sour mood has all but evaporated and he talks in that loud way of his, leaning up so he can get a look at the two people upfront. Max is just as chatty, and Steve is happy to let them converse, offering small hums here and there to show he's listening.

He's not really listening, but he doesn't need them knowing.

Whiskey eyes try to focus on the road as he makes another turn, this time onto Kerley. It's been one year since Hawkins last had to fight off monsters. One year since the mall went down in flames. One year since the Soviets and their needles and their gate. One year since Hopper disappeared.

He has nightmares still, about the base and the faces and the pain. Sometimes Robin's there, panicked eyes screaming at him to help. Other times he sees Dustin, the kid looking betrayed as the general smugly tells him about Steve's slip-up in his interrogation. Some nights he has dreams that leave him feeling physically cold. Those are the dreams he can never remember – whenever he tries, his head aches in a sharp sort of way that quickly has him leaving the whole thing alone. They take place in a space like the base under the

mall, but he knows somehow that's not where he is, and he hears voices that are somehow familiar and foreign all at once. Even now as he thinks about it a dull throb warns him against it just behind his eyes.

He thinks he can vaguely remember the boy that's been haunting his dreams his whole life, his brother that never was.

His thoughts wander further as the Beamer rolls onto Mirkwood.

Robin thinks he needs help. She may be right. Two weeks ago he almost had a full-blown panic attack in the back room of Family Video after seeing someone who looked eerily like the so-called doctor that nearly tugged his fingernails out with horrific ease. Even Keith had been surprised, awkwardly giving him the rest of the day off. Robin, bless her soul, tried talking him down, but ultimately she just held him while he sobbed frantically. Every day after that she gave him this look and he felt like he was suffocating under the weight of her pity, the cold force of her concern, the bitterness of her remorseful anger.

He still isn't sure how he knew she was feeling all of that so clearly. Steve's not great at a lot of things, but he's always had a knack for reading a room. You learned how to do that after witnessing your parents have screaming matches almost every night they actually stayed in Hawkins; he had to decide whether the tension in the air was manageable or too electric for him to safely involve himself in. When you struggle up the social ladder of high school, you learn how to read people and earn their favor. It's his thing, always interpreting, always feeling. It's been a year since that little quirk seemed to get more sensitive. He doesn't exactly know how he feels about that, or if it's a good thing at all.

Steve slowly tunes back into conversation as he turns off of Mirkwood and makes his way down a simple dirt path. From what he can tell, Dustin and Max didn't quite miss his additions to their conversation during the drive. Easily the two chattiest people in the Party, the older teen's convinced they could talk for a week straight, without pause, and never notice the lack of anyone else's input. It's impressive, if you ask Steve. Max's electric blue eyes catch his for a moment and she grins widely. She looks for all the world like a

normal girl, not like someone who'd almost lost her brother on the Fourth of July.

The Beamer finally comes to a halt. Steve laughs as the two kids scramble out of the car and rush up the driveway. He takes a moment to turn the ignition off and now he's suddenly feeling rather hesitant.

Why did he let them talk him into this?

The boy slumps in his seat. He should go home. He should crawl onto the couch in the living room and hide under blankets the rest of the night. The kids would not be particularly pleased with him, he's sure, but he'll make up for it with the gifts in the trunk. But if he leaves, when is he going to have a chance to leave those gifts for them? He certainly can't come back tomorrow, and after that he's just going to feel bad. Up ahead, Dustin's head tilts as he looks back at the car.

"Harrington! You coming?" Steve hesitates, waves the kid off, and as soon as Dustin turns again he drops his head against the wheel.

He really, *really* should leave.

The door is slammed shut with a nudge of his hip, and Steve trudges his way up the driveway. Joyce is at the door, all smiles as usual. In spite of his doubts, the boy can't help but smile back.

"Steve! I'm so glad you came," she greets, pulling him into a hug as soon as he gets near. Steve settles in her hold for a few brief moments before tugging away reluctantly.

"Hey, Mrs. Byers. I would have brought something with me, but -" Joyce cuts him off, gentle hands waving about dismissively.

"Oh, none of that," she chides, "And it's Joyce, honey. Besides, you can still help in the kitchen." Her smile turns almost sheepish. "I could use an extra hand." Joyce Byers is undoubtedly a stellar single parent, but Steve knows for a fact that her cooking ability is, well. *Rough*. Steve's been mastering the art since he was thirteen, he's gotten quite good at it. He nods at the woman as he slips past her

into the house and for a moment he's overwhelmed by how homey the place looks.

Wrapping paper, string lights, and other festive odds and ends litter the floor. Nancy and Jonathan seem to be in the process of setting up the tree in a corner. A holiday record plays loudly, barely heard over the roaring chatter of the kids yelling and running around. It's chaos, the very best kind. He's surrounded by the inherent warmth of it all and the lingering trepidation melts away quickly as Steve lets his shoulders relax.

Eleven notices him first among the kids, and is quick to slip out of a confused Mike's grip to greet him. Her hug is warm, and Steve holds her tight, one hand rubbing her back as he returns her embrace.

"Hey, kid," he chuckles, ruffling her hair. Eleven beams up at him.

"You came," she proclaims. Now Steve lets out a full laugh.

"Well, of course I did! I couldn't just not show up. Besides, you and Will left me with the little hellions, remember?" Will comes next, shy smile creeping across his face as he tucks himself easily against Steve's side. Steve pretends to give him a scolding look. "Had my ear talked off the whole way here thanks to you." Will knows for a fact the older teen isn't even remotely upset with him. The attempted glare melts into a grin and the boy relaxes, his smile growing easier as his slender arm squeezes around Steve's waist, then retracts as he backs off. Lucas, already trapped on the ground with Max and Erica, waves in greeting. His teeth flash brilliantly in his bright grin and Steve tips an imaginary hat in his direction. Not too far off, Mike nods in his own greeting, gruff in his usual manner but maybe the holiday magic is working because there's something unusually friendly about the gesture. Steve returns it in kind.

When Nancy realizes he's there, she falters at the sight of him and Steve's body almost flinches with the strangeness of it all. Her eyes blink once, twice before she gives him that sad, sort of awkward smile.

“I didn’t know you were coming.” Steve’s answering smile is painfully awkward.

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t planning on it. The kids roped me into this last-minute, you know how it is with them.” He becomes distinctly aware of Jonathan eyeing them from across the room, gaze flickering back and forth between the two, and clears his throat.

Yeah, maybe this is a little bit of a mistake.

His escape comes in the form of Joyce again, the woman’s comforting arm falling across his shoulders in a gentle hold.

“Come on, I’m stealing you away for a second. You’re the only competent chef in this house,” she jokes, but it isn’t really a joke. You’d think a couple of adults would know how to cook a decent meal – well, Joyce can cook a decent meal, but it’s just that. Jonathan can manage too, but he knows Nancy could burn water if she’s not careful/ His smile is only slightly less awkward as he’s guided into the kitchen, tossing an odd sort of goodbye to the girl as he goes. Joyce gives him a little squeeze as they enter the kitchen.

“Okay, do you think you could help me with this soup?”

He’s kept pleasantly busy after that. Between helping with Joyce’s mushroom soup, letting Dustin peel carrots for the pot roast, taking that job away after the kid hacked apart the vegetables beyond recognition, and attempting to restore some general sense of order to the lawless land of the kitchen, Steve barely has time to think about Nancy or Jonathan or the yelling all around him. He hardly pays attention to the pleasant buzz filling his body as a result of the warm atmosphere. It’s dark by the time all the food gets finished. He’s oddly proud of himself as he looks at the spread of food on the table. It’s nothing fancy, but beef and soup and biscuits on Christmas Eve isn’t a bad idea if you ask him.

The rest of the kids’ parents come by with extra sides and desserts, and Steve knows he can sit at the table with the rest of the adults. There’s space, and Joyce asks him sweetly if he’d like to sit with them. But Steve feels decidedly more comfortable on the living room floor with the kids, however.

And that just seems to be the bulk of his problems sometimes, doesn't it?

Steve Harrington is almost twenty one years old, and he has nearly no friends his own age. To top things off, he also has no idea what he's doing with himself currently, his past haunts his sleep and his waking hours, and his future is all but nonexistent. He peaked in high school and his life has been in a steady decline ever since. But it's not all bad – at least he's got the tragic honor of babysitting the six toughest kids in all the world.

And they aren't even kids anymore, are they? They're creeping up on their sixteenth birthdays, all of them. Dustin's is less than a month away already. Steve can't believe it. They were kids just yesterday, it feels. He was a kid just yesterday, wasn't he? Monsters have a funny way of forcing you to grow up, he supposes. And they've truly grown, his kids.

Eleven's curls bounce as her head swivels back and forth to follow their conversation, smile warm and genuine as she leans against Steve's right. Dustin's always by his side, the little snort. He looks so happy all the time, his eyes crinkling around the edges as he talks animatedly on his left. Mike's grown so tall, it's crazy. Coltish legs are folded awkwardly under him as he sits by Eleven's side. Lucas rivals Mike in height, though he looks significantly less awkward as he leans up against an engaged Max. She's cut her hair recently; it's not a bad look, though he knows she wants to grow it back out again. Something about her is tinged with a bitter sadness, something that makes Steve's throat choke up in a most peculiar way. He gets it, though; Billy's brush with death wasn't that long ago, and she's still struggling with her grief as she continues fixing her relationship with him. But she'll be alright, he knows. Billy's getting better, his brother's in town now helping him out. Her friends are too stubborn to allow her to struggle alone, even if Billy isn't their favorite. And on Mike's other side, simply enjoying the moment, sits Will. He's grown too, but he's kept much of his quiet mannerisms. He catches Steve's eye and smiles a little wider, an action Steve mimics.

Sometimes, the calmer Will Byers is the one Steve claims as his favorite. In all truth, he doesn't have a favorite.

He has different relationships with each kid, that's all. His relationships with some are weaker than others, weaker than he liked them to be. Some of them share a bond even Steve can't explain. But the one thing each relationship has in common is the boy's love for each and every one of them. There's no favoritism, even if he tells them otherwise. There's no choosing, none of that. Each of these six kids have Steve's whole heart.

It's Eleven who catches him staring next, and she must see the fondness on his face because the smile she gives him is soft and tender and knowing in its own way. Eleven took to him surprisingly quick; he didn't quite understand it yet, but he was glad the kid felt so at ease with him. There's something there, sort of. Like they've always somehow known each other. It feels like there's a connection he almost understands, but when he thinks too hard about it his head hurts and he ends up dropping it.

He's dragged into the present by Dustin very suddenly collapsing against his side, snorting in laughter as Mike stares at Lucas, offense clear on his face.

"How do you *not* like the Beastie Boys?" he questions, and now it's Steve's turn to snort.

"No one *likes* the Beastie Boys, Mike," he chuckles, trying to ignore the appalled look the younger teen gives him. "It's just what you listen to when you reach the teen rebellion phase."

"I'm not rebellious!" Mike huffs. Steve's sure Karen Wheeler would beg to differ.

He doesn't want to spend the night. Joyce already has her hands full with all these kids, and he doesn't want to add on to that, so he goes out to the car once the kids have all gone to sleep in the basement and gets his sack of presents and he's going to leave after giving them to Hopper, but Joyce stops him, a curious look on her face.

"You're not leaving, are you?" she questions. Steve feels awkward now, shifts his weight from one foot to the other.

“You’ve already got plenty of people spending the night, Mrs. By-“

“None of that,” she cuts him off with a wave of her hand. “You’ll have to come back tomorrow anyway if you leave, you’re having dinner with us.” Steve doesn’t remember agreeing to that, but now he doesn’t have a choice. Jonathan, setting a gift under the tree, hums in agreement.

“She’s right, you know,” he confirms as he stands straight again. “Can’t get out of this one, the kids won’t leave your door until you come back with them. It’ll be much easier on everyone if you just stay.”

And he doesn’t want to because this is *their* tradition, this is something they’ve been doing together for years as one large family and Steve isn’t really a part of that, so he wants to give them space, but Joyce is already dragging him back inside with the gifts, then she’s off grabbing blankets and Jonathan busies him with the task of wrapping last-minute gifts until he forgets wanting to leave.

The couch is his for the night. Joyce gets him some of Jonathan’s clothes and even kisses his forehead and wishes him a merry Christmas before retreating to her room for the night. Jonathan wishes him a good rest, and he understands because it’s already ass o’clock in the morning and it’s only a matter of time before those kids come barreling up the stairs to yell about their gifts. The living room is dark, aside from the gentle blinking of the string lights on the tree. It’s a silent night, indeed. He feels warm, and not just from the blankets tucked in close around him.

2. blue christmas

Summary for the Chapter:

billy's having a little bit of a rough day.

Notes for the Chapter:

is this short? yes. will the next chapter be longer?
absolutely.

Billy's memories of Jason are as vivid as his memories of their mother. He remembers being close to his brother, once upon a time. Jason was the goofball of the pair, he loved making jokes and pulling pranks. He remembers nights they used to spend on the beach, nestled together by bonfires watching the blue waves roll and lap at the sand. He remembers other nights curled close in the same bed as their parents screamed and fought. He remembers their promises to each other, that they'd protect each other no matter what. But most of all, Billy remembers being abandoned by his mother, who grabbed Jason one night and never looked back.

She moved further north after that and remarried some fisher, he now knows. She works at a library and she's happy. It makes him relieved and hurt and angry all at once. But he only shows Jason the anger. That's all he ever shows his brother, every day since the blonde decided to come up and care for Billy during his recovery. The *Starcourt incident* had somehow hit the coast – a hostage situation in the mall that had supposedly claimed his life before he showed up a year later after escaping the men who'd kidnapped him from the scene (*and he doesn't think it's a believable story at all, but so far no one's really questioned its validity*) - and when Jason and Lilian Scott, no longer Hargroves, saw the familiar name in the paper it was decided that Jason needed to go and check on his long-lost twin. Billy was just being released at that point, with the option to either go home and recover in that little house on Cherry Lane or to find a caretaker and start over in a little apartment over on the very edge of town. The latter was the only choice Billy *could* make, and here he is now – in a cramped place, safe from the anger of Neil Hargrove and at the complete mercy of Jason Scott.

Jason seems happy to be here, much to Billy's dismay. He told him once that he'd missed him growing up – and Billy knows it's more likely than not, because Jason didn't *choose* to leave like that. It was a choice made for both of them by their mother. But Billy has had to suffer through hell for her choice, and it hurts to see Jason so carefree and easy when he himself spent the last decade or so being actively denied that choice. And so he told Jason he hadn't missed him. Their relationship, if it can be called that, is so tense it threatens to *choke* Billy under the weight. And he knows he can help make it a little easier, but he can't, not really. He's spent so long accepting that his best friend, his first partner in crime, was gone, and now that he's back he doesn't know how to let him in again. Besides, he knows that Jason isn't staying for good; once he heals, his twin will go back to his happy life on the coast, and Billy will be left here to trudge along through life on his own. There's no reason to let himself get attached again, not when he already knows how that will end for him.

So he stays distant. He stays cold. But it's Christmas, so today he's less so.

It's been a weird day. Max came by to wish both twins a happy holiday, which was nice. Billy isn't sure why she does it, but ever since the mall Max has apparently made the decision to care about him. He doesn't bother to ask why, and he meets her efforts with plenty of grunts and uncaring snaps, but he quietly, to himself, appreciates it. Somehow, he thinks Max knows, though, because she always gives him this knowing smile when she leaves. Really, he's happy she showed up today. He gifts her with a bracelet, an item he's spent hours braiding painstakingly as a part of his recovery process, and hooked a little skateboard charm to it. Max's face lit up at the sight of it, and that made the whole process a little more worthwhile in his mind. Max gives him a little Hot Wheels version of his beloved Camaro, which drags a genuine smile onto his face.

She doesn't stay very long, and by the end of the evening it's just Billy and Jason, perched on opposite sides of the couch eating Kentucky Fried Chicken and watching Home Alone. Jason is, admittedly, trying to make this a little easier on the both of them. He chats idly between scenes about Christmases spent elsewhere, by the coast or with new family members. He tries to avoid their mother,

but Billy can't stop thinking about her – smiling and happy, celebrating without a single thought to her ex-husband or her lost son. He wonders if she's even thinking about him now, now that she knows what's happened to him. He wonders why she didn't come here to see him – maybe she's avoiding his father, maybe she doesn't want the guilt of facing him. Either way, Jason's half-hearted attempts to make the situation bearable makes it *worse*. And so Billy gives up, heaves himself up off the sofa and flexes his hands. Jason watches him with a frown. "You okay?" he asks. Billy waves him off.

"Yeah. I'm going for a cigarette run." They both know he doesn't smoke anymore, his lungs can't handle the smoke and tar that comes with the habit. It's been hell on his need to have something in his mouth, but he's coping well enough with toothpicks and lollipops. Jason frowns at him again.

"You can't smoke, Billy," he reminds him. As though Billy could forget. He doesn't bother looking at his brother as he moves down the hall to go grab a jacket, then his keys.

"Yeah, I know, don't worry about it," he dismisses, shrugging the jacket on. "I'll be back in a little bit, 'kay? Don't wait up for me." From the corner of his eye, he can see the way Jason frowns at him, lips pursed *just* the way their mother does, but he doesn't focus on it much as he slips out of the apartment and down the steps towards the car.

The beloved Camaro had been mauled during that night, but the government is doing a lot to keep him quiet. They got him this little place, gave him a shit ton of cash, have paid for his medical bills, and he demanded they repair the Camaro, and so they did. And Billy, grateful for the return of his car, used it as much as he could. He drives a lot, mainly at night when others can't see him. He's no longer the prideful showoff he once was, he knows people whisper about the silvery pink scars criss-crossing his skin and the way his hands move now and the way he breathes a little heavier if he does too much, and he doesn't really care for that behavior, doesn't like being the center of negative attention. So he sticks to the night, like this. Foreigner plays on the radio and he tries to focus on the strumming guitars and beating drums and familiar voice as he zips down the empty roads – mostly service roads, not necessarily meant

for public traffic that time of night but Billy doesn't particularly care. They're easy to speed down, and the feeling of icy air cutting through the cabin of the car through the open windows makes him feel a little more real, a little more like a person than whatever the hell he's been feeling like.

He doesn't expect anything to happen, he's not thinking about much at all, letting thoughts filter in and out in an angry flow. All those thoughts come to a screeching halt, though, when he sees *Steve fucking Harrington in the middle of the street*.

From what Billy's been told, Steve spent a lot of time visiting him in the hospital. Poor guy got the shit beat out of him by some commies according to Max, who said she'd only heard that from Dustin, who'd apparently had to rescue him and his new friend Robin. He didn't really speak much to the other boy after that one night in the Byers house, didn't really see him much after that. Once he graduated, Harrington sort of disappeared. The only time Billy saw him was at the mall, where he'd worked. He thinks he saw him in the mall that night too, wouldn't be surprising considering how much time he seemed to like spending with the kids, and the fact that Harrington had apparently squared off with the monsters a couple of times before Billy met them himself.

And now, he's in the middle of the road on Christmas night, wide eyes wild and hair even wilder. He's skinny as all hell, doesn't look like he's eaten in a while. And Billy, catching his breath after slamming on the brakes, starts to realize that there's *no way* this is Steve Harrington – there are a handful of moles on Steve's face he's practically memorized *for no particular reason, thank you for asking*, and maybe it's just the distance between them but he doesn't see them.

The dirty, baggy clothes are also a giveaway too, he supposes.

He opens the car door and the not-quite-Steve in front of him nearly takes off for the woods, but the blonde calls to him. "Hey, hey, slow down." Wide brown eyes watch him warily, but the boy doesn't move. Billy doesn't go all the way up to him, moving around the front of his car and stopping by the headlight. "You got a name, man?" The poor thing looks scared out of his mind as he shifts, wraps

his arms around himself.

“Theodore,” he says. “Teddy. One.” Billy furrows his brow.

“One?” The Harrington clone nods, shows his wrist to the other. Upon Squinting, Billy notes there’s a tattoo there, kinda like the one he remembers on that girl’s arm – instead of an eleven, however, he catches a neat “001” printed on his skin. He hasn’t seen Steve in a little while, but he’s sure the other didn’t have one of those. He looks around, half-expecting something to happen, some doctor to come out or a monster to appear, but it’s just them, and it’s cold, and the poor thing’s shivering. “Come on,” he sighs, gesturing with his head. “Inside, let’s go.” Teddy doesn’t take the bait initially, and Billy groans softly. “I’m not gonna do anything to you, dude, just get in the car and we can get you some food or something.” The promise of food seems to help convince the brunette that this is a safe option, and he finally edges his way to the passenger door.

If there was ever a time to smoke, this is it.

He learns through the rest of the drive that the boy, Theodore, definitely comes from the lab, like that girl. He’s lived there his whole life, only escaped recently while the scientists began the process of moving other experiments – which doesn’t settle well in Billy’s stomach, the idea of other humans being used by the government like that. The woods have plenty of abandoned homes, and apparently the ability to induce unconsciousness in others is pretty helpful when you want to steal food. It’s frankly *terrifying* to know the small guy in his passenger seat is capable of shutting off his higher brain functions on a *whim*, but he looks about as harmless as Steve Harrington and so he doesn’t think he’s in too much danger.

“You happen to know a Steve Harrington?” he asks, mostly as a joke. And it’s a good thing they’re on empty service roads because when Teddy says yes Billy slams on the breaks once again. His head is beginning to throb. “Say that again?” The boy in the passenger seat blinks.

“I know Steve,” he says, and he says it simply too, like that should have been apparent. “He’s my brother.”

Okay. Billy closes his eyes and counts down from ten in an effort to stop himself from having an aneurysm.

“Steve Harrington’s your brother. For real.” Teddy’s starting to look anxious again as he nods, and Billy backtracks, not wanting to upset the other lest his brain suffer the consequences.

“So he’s got weird brain powers too?” the blonde asks as the car begins moving again. Theodore nods beside him.

“Yes. He struggled with them,” he shares. “When we were alone and didn’t feel pressure, he could do whatever he wanted. But the moment the men would come in, he’d get anxious and struggled to control it.” Teddy smiles fondly, and Billy can’t quite look at him as he tries to imagine a little Steve Harrington doing his thing. He’s sure Steve was a pretty baby, but the knowledge that apparently the little guy had been used by a *lab* brings with it a sort of discomfort. But Steve turned out okay, he guesses – the Harringtons found him and he’s been the resident rich boy ever since.

“So why is he out here?” he tries piecing it all together.

“They never killed experiments, really,” Theodore explains. “Not unless something bad happened. Steve was young, so they just wiped his memory and took him away.” Billy mulls that information over in his head for a while.

“Do you want me to take you to his place?” he asks after a pause. Theodore’s smile saddens.

“No. Not safe right now,” he hums. “If I went, it would draw attention to him, they would try and take him back.”

“Oh.” Billy guesses that makes sense. “Well, I could take you to my place for now. We can figure out what to do with you tomorrow. Get some food in you and all.” He tries for a kind smile and it must work because Theodore smiles back and nods.

“Yes. Okay,” he agrees. “Food would be nice.” His stomach must agree, because Billy hears it rumble, and he nods his head.

“Okay. Food and maybe a bath tonight. Everything else can wait

for tomorrow.” Theodore smiles happily in agreement, and Billy tries not to think *too* hard about how he ended up in this situation as he turns back onto the main roads of town. He tries to think even less about how he’s explaining this to Jason when he finally gets back.

Notes for the Chapter:

comments and kudos are the bread and butter to my soul, feed me please.

Author's Note:

comments and kudos cure my depression and it's cheaper then therapy help your pal out babes <3